

Rosemount Neighborhood and Community Integration

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On behalf of

The City of Rosemount

With support from

The Resilient Communities Project

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This project was supported by the Resilient Communities Project (RCP), a program at the University of Minnesota that convenes the wide-ranging expertise of U of M faculty and students to address strategic local projects that advance community resilience and sustainability. RCP is a program of the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA).



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OVERVIEW

This report shares the summary findings from a student-consulting project undertaken by six members of SW8551 *Community Assessment and Engagement*. Student consultation existed as a function of the Resilient Communities Project, a collaboration between the University of Minnesota and the City of Rosemount. Research and consultation began in the fall of 2014 and is ongoing until the close of the spring 2015 semester.

TOPIC

With largely undeveloped farmland to the south, the Mississippi River to the east, and the Twin Cities only 15 miles north, Rosemount exists at a unique intersection of agricultural, rural and urban communities. Rosemount's population has nearly doubled in the last decade, including an influx of increasingly diverse populations. The City of Rosemount expressed interest in building community and communication with newer and harder to reach residents of Rosemount, specifically people immigrating from outside of the United States, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, and Asian or Asian American populations. SW 8551 members conducted a series of community observations, informal community interviews, and community surveys to gather information regarding the following:

- What is the best way to communicate with the harder to reach populations?
- Where are people currently getting important information?
- Why have people chosen to live in Rosemount?
- How can Rosemount build a greater sense of connection and community among all residents?

METHODS

Community Observations: SW 8551 group members recorded community observations on two visits to Rosemount. In addition, community observations were drawn from census data and collected from city publications and the city's website. Areas of focus included geographic, economic, social, political, and demographic characteristics.

Informal Interviews: Three informal, convenience interviews were conducted with community members during community observations. Community members were briefed about the scope and purpose of the project and notes were recorded to document the interviews.

Community Surveys: Community surveys were administered to library patrons on two separate occasions. SW8551 students were housed in the lobby of the Robert Trail Library Branch, and asked community members on their way in or out of the library if they would be willing to take a short survey. Those who stopped were briefed about the scope and purpose of the survey, and given an option to be read the survey on their own or to have the survey read aloud. Surveys were administered in the afternoon of April 16th from 1pm to 4pm, and in the evening of April 21, 2015 from 6:30pm to 9pm.

FINDINGS

Overall

- Twenty-seven community members, half of whom were middle school students, completed the survey.
- All but one respondent had internet access, and 18 of the 27 reported that they sought important information online or through e-mail. Seven respondents, one of whom was a middle school student, suggested developing a Rosemount listserv or e-mail newsletter to distribute information. Other respondents accessed important information from the Community Center, Library, local newspaper, at school, and face-to-face exchanges.

Adult Respondents:

- Five reported choosing to live in Rosemount because of the school district, four because of affordable housing, three because of employment, and two because of the “small town atmosphere.” Other answers included lifelong residency, church, close to the Twin Cities, low crime, and a “good place to raise kids.”
- When asked what would strengthen your sense of community, five suggested having more community events, three suggested more businesses, two did not answer the question, one suggested a town meeting, one suggested offering free wireless internet, and one wrote that they could make more effort to be involved.
- Ten reported feeling a part of the community, two reported not feeling a part of the community, and one said they were “getting there through kids’ sports.” Of adult respondents who did not feel a part of the community, both listed being busy with work as their primary reason.

- Reasons for feeling a part of the community included friendliness of residents, kids' involvement in sports, church, the library, participating in the schools, the senior center, and community activities.

Youth respondents:

- Three respondents, all of whom were students, answered yes to the question of translating materials; five were unsure, unaware of, or did not know whether information needed translating, 16 did not think materials needed translating, and three did not answer the question.
- Ten reported feeling a part of the community, and four reported not feeling a part of the community.
- Five reported living in Rosemount because of friends, family, and fun activities; four reported living Rosemount because one parent moved to Rosemount; and four reported living in Rosemount because they had to.
- To answer the question of why they did not feel a part of the community, two youth listed spending most of their time with another parent in a different city, one reported feeling mistreated by schools, and one reported race as the primary reason.
- Those who felt a part of the community listed fun teachers and neighbors, friends, community activities, and volunteering or "helping out around town" as the reasons.
- Six suggested more community activities; three suggested more volunteer opportunities and two did not answer the question. Other answers included "stay together," "people being nicer," and "more water fountains and port-o-potties outside."

DISCUSSION

Community Strengths: Our methods reveal Rosemount to be a community of many strengths. Most notably, the relative affluence of the community, access to affordable housing, an excellent school district, a location in close proximity to the Twin Cities that still preserves a more intimate "small town feel," the commitment on the part of many community leaders and city officials to serving all community members, and many residents' sense of safety and community. Additionally, although the city is still growing, Rosemount already has several resources in place such as the local library and the city website to distribute information in a manner that many of the residents in our survey requested.

Recommendations: Despite Rosemount's many strengths, city officials and community members have commendably recognized the changing needs of the community, particularly as the city's population increases, and residents become more racially and

ethnically diverse. The following are a list of recommendations and future directions garnered from community observations, surveys, and interviews to increase community integration and communicate more effectively with harder to reach populations.

1. *Revitalize downtown and create more businesses.*

Several residents, particularly those who moved to Rosemount within the last five years, expressed a desire for Rosemount to build a more thriving downtown or commercial district. These residents were most often drawn to Rosemount for its schools, affordable housing, and relative proximity to the Twin Cities. While a business or commercial district in town may not be entirely functionally necessary, it was cited frequently as a way to achieve greater community cohesion.

2. *Create an online city newsletter to be distributed through e-mail.*

This was an explicit recommendation of seven survey respondents. A newsletter would help market community events and services, and connect residents to community resources. Additionally, an online newsletter could serve as a platform for greater community involvement and discussion, either through including a letter to the editor or community publications component. It would also afford those community members who do not yet feel a strong sense of community an opportunity to become more intimately familiar with Rosemount and make contributions in a relatively safe and initially anonymous way. Furthermore, an online newsletter may also provide an opportunity to discuss potential downtown revitalization, which may offer a clearer understanding of the types of businesses that several residents are envisioning.

3. *Seek access to target population through the school district and library.*

While we were largely unable to reach a substantial portion of our target population, we were able to have valuable contact with the youth, many of whom reported being newer to Rosemount and who displayed a great deal more racial and ethnic diversity than adult populations. Given the pronounced desirability of Rosemount Schools and mandatory attendance of all school-age youth, schools may be an excellent venue for distributing information. Additionally, the schools may offer a suitable location to host some of the festivals and group gatherings that were mentioned by several survey respondents. Creating an equitable and inclusive environment in schools can serve as a launch pad for greater future cohesion as well. Furthermore, the library also offers another potential venue for distribution. Many of the middle school students visit the library after school and several adults have stated that the library is a great place to receive information. With the library already offering several classes, there may be an opportunity for the library to add more classes that specifically target some of the newer and growing diverse groups within Rosemount, which may also increase future cohesion.